

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Interagency Council on Homelessness



Notes from the Meeting of the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)

Date and Time: September 2, 2009; 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm
Location: N Street Village, 1333 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005
Approximate Attendance: 90
An agenda was distributed.

Welcome and Introductions

Neil O. Albert, City Administrator (CA), called the meeting to order and then opened the meeting for comments from the public.

Public Comment Period

There was a public comment period, but this reporter was not present.

Summary of the Discussion from the Pre-Meeting Focus Groups–Schroeder Stribling, Deputy Executive Director, N Street Village

- A focus group (round table) was held prior to the ICH meeting so that key issues could be discussed in some detail by members of the homeless community with the findings or conclusions of the discussions presented at the subsequent ICH meeting. This input is sought in order to inform the planning process of the ICH and its committees. More than fifty individuals participated in this session.
- Participants were asked to reflect on specific questions or topics and to offer their input and perspectives through both small group conversations and in written comments. These questions were discussed today:

Topic: Information

1. *What would be the most useful “self-help” information to have available in the shelters? Be sure to give specific topics.*
2. *What are the best ways to provide “self-help” information and resources for people who are homeless? Examples could include: information binders/reading material, internet-based sources, toll-free telephone numbers, access to telephone and computers, and others. What are your recommendations?*
 - A few themes that emerged from the conversations about Information were:
 - Self-help information available in the shelters should be in binders, on bulletin boards, and on kiosks. Access to both computers and telephones is also needed.
 - Information about housing, jobs, and health care is needed.

Topic: Transportation

1. *What are fair practices regarding the availability and operation of the transportation system for those who are homeless, including persons with disabilities?*
2. *Would you consider a card, such as the DC One Card, that would allow you to access public transportation, the public library, and other services to be an asset? Do you have any problems with a card such as this? Please be specific.*
 - A few themes that emerged from the conversations about Transportation were:
 - Transportation should be provided for those with medical appointments and for those over 60 years of age.
 - Directions and maps are needed, timing and coordination in the transportation system are necessary, and drivers should be knowledgeable about programs.
 - Accessible vans are needed, and there should be more than one available.
 - Generally, there should be fair practices in the transportation service, and the DC One card should be available.
 - Regarding curfew, there should be one day that clients do not have to be at their beds so that they may travel.
 - Other comments included the following:
 - Concern was expressed about how to get an answer from an agency. This was framed as an accountability issue.
 - Clients should volunteer for two hours per week.
 - Each question was discussed in facilitated sub-groups, and summaries of the conversations, input, and ideas generated were given at intervals by each group. Schroeder Stribling, Deputy Executive Director, N Street Village, gave a summary of the results of the discussions to the assembled ICH, and a written summary is also available.

ICH Committee Reports

Steering Committee – Scott McNeilly, Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (WLCH)

- To ensure adequate participation by all members and stakeholders in the ICH, those in attendance were encouraged to sign up to participate in ICH standing committees. These are the Steering Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Operations and Logistics Committee. A sheet was circulated so that those in attendance could register for one or more of these committees.

Operations and Logistics Committee – Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities

- This committee has been focused on finalizing the Winter Plan for the 2009–2010 hypothermia season that begins on November 1, 2009 and ends on March 31, 2010. To that end, there was a hypothermia debriefing session for the 2008–2009 season on April 20th at the offices of the United Planning Organization (UPO), and the first 2009–2010 winter season planning meeting was held on June 24th at DHS Headquarters. Also, a public hearing was held on August 6th to seek real time input on the plan for the upcoming season. The Winter Plan is now available, and the ICH will vote on it at this meeting.

- This committee continues to study discharge planning, and the intention is to focus on the health and safety issues involved by examining discharges from jails, prisons, and hospitals. One goal is to find ways and means to keep individuals from moving from one institution (e.g., corrections or a hospital) to another, such as the shelter system. The DC Hospital Association (DCHA), the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), and the Criminal Justice Coordination Council (CJCC) are among organizations and agencies involved in this effort. We want to reinvigorate the discharge planning efforts that were started years ago and, using that work as a base, move forward in this area.
- This committee will be working with other partners on disaster planning and how those who are homeless will be impacted and served if there is an unusual occurrence or emergency.
- There is still a need for a comprehensive resource guide, and we continue seek ways to provide current, accurate, and comprehensive information to all interested parties. We want to build on what is already available, and we may seek ways to engage with the District's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) to develop usable applications.

Strategic Planning Committee – Clarence Carter, Director, DHS

- The Strategic Planning Committee is a multi-disciplinary team seeking ways to end homelessness, and it continues its work by identifying policy objectives, constituencies that we are to serve, and service strategies across seven dimensions, namely, Available to All, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, Employment, Discharge Planning, and Healthcare/HIV. The constituencies are individual men, women, and youth; families; seniors; veterans; and ex-offenders.
- Four broad policy objectives that have been identified are prevention of homelessness, exit from homelessness, redesign of the continuum of care, and evaluation of progress in preventing and reducing homelessness.
- The committee has held meetings with constituents and with partner organizations, and a public meeting will be scheduled soon in cooperation with the Operations and Logistics Committee.

The Winter Plan for the 2009–2010 Hypothermia Season: Discussion and Vote – Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities

- Chapman Todd gave an overview of the process for development of the plan, and he noted that the District has a legal obligation to provide shelter during the winter season. A hypothermia debriefing session for the 2008–2009 season was held on April 20th at the offices of the United Planning Organization (UPO), and notes were published from that session. The Operations and Logistics Committee has the primary responsibility for development of the plan, but the meetings were open to all. The first 2009–2010 winter season planning meeting was held on June 24th at DHS Headquarters. A public hearing on the plan was held on August 6th at Thrive DC. A diverse group of stakeholders provided input for the plan. Data sources included census figures from last season and information provided by So Others Might Eat (SOME). The committee anticipates the need for shelter and other services during the winter based on feedback and other factors, but it has no control over resources.

- This season we will publish a map showing outreach coverage and a transportation schedule. It was noted that transportation service was much improved last year when compared to previous years.
- Mr. Todd reviewed the process that the committee used to develop the capacity numbers, and Fred Swan (DHS) discussed the operation of the overflow capacity.
- Cheryl Barnes expressed concern about individuals having to wait outside in inclement weather, and she wanted to ensure that there were sufficient beds for women after midnight.
- Laura Zeilinger (DHS) said that there may be additional demand this season because of the economy but that federal funds from the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) would be available.
- There was discussion about the homeless services budget, service priorities, and capacity. The family capacity figures were reviewed and discussed, and it was noted that DHS will be housing families in its permanent supportive housing (PSH) program and that HPRP resources would be available later in the season.
- The availability and operation of overflow capacity, especially for men, generated a great deal of discussion. Mr. Swan reviewed how the overflow would function, and he noted that it has worked well in previous years. Those needing shelter may call 311 or the Shelter Hotline to access the overflow capacity if it is needed.
- After extensive discussion, the plan passed with the stipulation that there will be more discussion about how the overflow capacity will operate. This matter will be discussed further in the forthcoming Operations and Logistics Committee meeting.

Report on Shelter Capacity–Michael Ferrell, Coalition for the Homeless

- The subcommittee concerned with shelter capacity matters issued preliminary recommendations for the provision of adequate shelter for both individuals and families in a report dated September 2, 2009. The committee is seeking ways to better utilize existing shelters on a year–round basis.
- The preliminary recommendations are contained in the report that was distributed, and they focus on improvements in service coordination, how to maximize use of transitional programs, discharge planning, permanent supportive housing, and the impact of Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re–Housing Program (HPRP) funds.

Identification: Non–Driver Identification Card; DC Healthcare Alliance Residency Verification

- There was a presentation about the availability of free identification cards from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Residents who are homeless, as certified by an approved social service provider, are eligible to receive a non-driver identification card free of charge. Applicants must submit the required documentation to DMV for proof of name and birth and social security. They must also submit a completed “Proof of Residency and No Fee Identification Card” form.

- A representative from D.C. Health Care Alliance (Alliance) distributed their Proof of Residency form and instructions for its use. The Alliance is a free health insurance program for uninsured, low income DC residents. To be eligible, applicants must be able to prove DC residency, among other conditions.

Presentation about Transitional Housing Corporation

Because of the length of the meeting, this presentation was postponed.

Public Comment Period

- There were comments about what constituted DC residency and whether people were coming to DC from other jurisdictions for services because of the poor economy.
- A speaker asked if the DC budget is available to the public, and she was directed to the DC website at dc.gov for information.
- A representative of a group called The People for Fairness Coalition distributed information about this group and its planned outreach efforts for the hypothermia season.
- Other topics discussed during this period included the availability of emergency detoxification during hypothermia, the distribution of blankets, and communication of hypothermia alerts to the provider community and to clients.
- Concerns were raised about the upcoming flu season, and it was noted that the government is working on a plan for the shelters, including how to distribute vaccine.
- A speaker from Harriet Tubman Shelter expressed the need for employment. Another speaker responded that there were jobs available at a school near the shelter.

Adjournment

After the public comment period, Mr. Albert adjourned the meeting.

###

Next Meetings (Dates and times are subject to change.)

- Tuesday, November 3, 2009, at Miriam's Kitchen, 2401 Virginia Avenue, NW, from 2 to 3: 30 pm. The pre-meeting roundtable session will take place from 12:30 to 1:30 pm.